

U.S.-China resume news exchange after 22 years

A freer flow of news between the United States and the People's Republic of China has lifted the bamboo curtain higher than it has been for 22 years.

An agreement for the exchange of news and pictures on a regular basis is already effective for the Associated Press and the New China News Agency (Hsinhua), and a similar arrangement was being ironed out this week in meetings of United Press International and Hsinhua officers in Peking.

Although there has been no actual void in the reporting of significant news from Red China since press and diplomatic relations were severed in 1949, the freshly signed written agreements herald a promising era of two-way information, in the view of Wes Gallagher, AP president, who has returned to his office in Rockefeller Center after a three week visit to nine cities in China.

At party for Sihanouk

The invitation to Gallagher and his wife, Betty, to be guests of Hsinhua, the official news agency, climaxed weeks of delicate discussions with Chinese officials here about the possibility of restoring Sino-U.S. press relations. Finally, the AP was invited to send a delegation of its own choosing to Peking to conclude the arrangement for a news exchange.

This group included Paul Miller, AP board chairman, and his wife, Louise; Henry Hartzelbusch, AP Tokyo chief; Horst Faas, AP's Vietnam photographer; and the Gallaghers.

They met Premier Chou En-lai at a party given by him for Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia but no one, Gallagher said, had any opportunity to interview the prime minister. Faas photographed Chou greeting the AP delegation.

The premier did not participate personally in the negotiation of the news exchange agreement but he was familiar with it. Executives of Hsinhua are members of the government hierarchy.

'Everything we asked for'

"We got everything we had asked for," Gallagher said.

On arrival in Peking, he related, the AP and the Hsinhua proposals were exchanged for study. A few days later, Miller and Gallagher met with the Chinese group and each document was signed ceremoniously. The Chinese desired something less formal than a contract, so it was "an exchange of letters." That night Miller hosted a party for the Chinese.

Undoubtedly, Gallagher surmised, this

reopening of press relations on a formal basis is experimental but he sensed an intention to broaden the scope of the exchange, particularly when relations between Peking and Tokyo are improved.

As of now, the AP is authorized to pick up the Hsinhua photo transmissions—usually two a day—to Tokyo and Hsinhua may help itself to as many AP Wirephotos as it wishes.

News copy from the Chinese agency is sent by mail from Peking to Canton and a messenger takes it from there to Hong Kong where it is delivered to the AP office. The radio newscast to Hong Kong also may be picked up.

Improvement in service due

Indications of friendlier contacts between the Chinese and Japanese, Gallagher said, give promise that a teleprinter service will be established for the Hsinhua news wire between Peking and Tokyo, as well as photo circuits. The first step may be a daily air service between the two capitals.

Besides receiving copy of the AP World Service reports in Tokyo, Hsinhua representatives at the United Nations in New York have access to the AP's A wire copy in its bureau there.

In the years since AP's correspondent, Fred Hampson, was ushered out of Peking along with other western newsmen, the news service has monitored the Hsinhua copy in Hong Kong. An occasional item rated worldwide distribution.

Under the agreement, Gallagher said, there is no monetary consideration except in cases where special request material involves an expense. Hsinhua and the AP will both honor each other's requests for stories and pictures.

The whole arrangement is similar to that between the AP and the Soviet agency, Tass.

Separate matter

The question of establishing a bureau in Peking didn't arise in the Hsinhua negotiations, Gallagher said, because that is a matter for the Foreign Office. He conferred with officials in the Ministry of Information and gained the impression that China was in no hurry to resume press relations on a full scale.

"They made it plain that the Hsinhua-AP exchange and the probability of resident correspondents in Peking and Washington were to be treated separately," Gallagher said.